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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000278

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2018

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SUBJECT: SITUATION REPORT: WAITING GAME OR END GAME? THE  
OPPOSITION REMAINS PATIENT, FOR NOW

REF: HARARE 275

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Six days after Zimbabwe's national elections, the waiting game for official results continues amid rumors of a runoff, escalating tensions, and hopes for a peaceful end to the political crisis. On April 4, opposition presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai updated the diplomatic corps in a closed-door briefing. Following a night of searches and arrests by Zimbabwe's security forces, Tsvangirai reiterated his party's commitment to demonstrating

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restraint while still calling for the electoral commission to confirm results. Tsvangirai again stated that he was willing to participate in a runoff (despite his belief that he won the election outright), but only within the 21 day period specified by the law. He urged the international community to continue its calls for results to be released. Patient up to this point, it is unclear how much longer the MDC, and the country, can wait for results. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Describing the current situation as a "continued, intractable predicament," MDC presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai held a closed-door briefing for the diplomatic

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corps on April 4, a full six days after the March 29 presidential and parliamentary elections. Tsvangirai cautioned against hopes of an imminent announcement of results by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), stating that it may be another two to three days before ZEC completes verification of the presidential vote. He noted that despite escalating tensions, including the search of the MDC's command center and arrests of journalists and NGO workers made overnight (reftel), the MDC would continue to show restraint while waiting for the results and the Mugabe regime's reaction. Tsvangirai stated that the MDC had heard

a rumor that MDC Secretary General Tendai Biti had been arrested. (NOTE: We later learned from MDC sources that Biti was not in custody. END NOTE.) It is feared, though, that authorities are seeking to detain and possibly charge him for announcing, before official election results, that the MDC had won.

¶3. (SBU) Tsvangirai again stated that while he was confident that he had won the election outright with over 50 percent of the vote, he remained willing to contest in a runoff. However, he was adamant that the runoff take place within 21 days following the announcement of the results, as specified in the Electoral Act. Tsvangirai reported that the MDC "has it on good authority" that Mugabe was considering delaying the runoff by three to six months, a change that Tsvangirai described as "against the will of the people." The MDC understood that Mugabe had been advised by the Attorney General that he could authorize the delay by presidential decree. Tsvangirai likened such a move to "a player acting as a referee, changing the goal posts to suit his position." The MDC legal team was exploring whether a presidential decree would be legal. Tsvangirai also noted that he expected the runoff would proceed under the same parameters as the first round and would include the presence of independent observers and the media.

¶4. (SBU) Tsvangirai went on to decry the ongoing political stalemate while the country "is on its knees" and called for those who have influence over Mugabe to advise him that it was in his best interest to accept defeat. Tsvangirai noted that ZANU-PF was unable to pay for a runoff within the next 21 days and that such an exercise would only serve to further polarize the political situation, removing the opportunity for national reconciliation and a dignified exit for Mugabe. Tsvangirai stated that a contest held in three to six months

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was no longer a runoff, but a new election; one that would be

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held in a different political climate.

¶5. (SBU) Addressing concerns about the detention and arrest of foreign journalists the previous night, Tsvangirai criticized the Mugabe regime for restricting media access to the country. He also advised diplomats to tell the media to be cautious and not invite intervention by police by operating without accreditation. Tsvangirai stated that he believed security forces remained willing to protect the will of the people and respect the constitution, despite their politicization under ZANU-PF.

¶6. (SBU) Tsvangirai confirmed that he had spoken with a number of African leaders and members of the international community, including Kofi Annan and South African President Thabo Mbeki. Tsvangirai applauded Mbeki's April 3 statement calling for the results to be respected by all parties. Tsvangirai urged the international community to continue to

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demand the announcement of official results and for ZEC and ZANU-PF to act within the confines of the law.

¶7. (SBU) Tsvangirai also confirmed that the results announced up to this point by ZEC coincided with the MDC's own tally based on vote totals posted outside polling sites. He expressed satisfaction that the democratic opposition would now control parliament and expected that the MDC would work closely with other opposition MPs toward an absolute majority of 106 seats.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Amid concerns about a government crackdown against the opposition and civil society, the MDC continues to calmly and cautiously wait for the ZEC announcement, play down fears of mass violence, and reach out to the international community. However, Tsvangirai's patience may

begin to run thin if Mugabe moves to extend the runoff period or continues his intimidation tactics against the opposition.

The willingness to wait by Zimbabweans has been commendable, but if an end to the standoff does not come soon, such restraint may come off the table. END COMMENT.

MCCEE